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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effects of a newly redesigned teacher education internship program at West Texas A&M University, the STEP (Student/Teacher Expanded Program) program, on teaching interns' performance. STEP participants were placed in 1-year internships and paid 75 percent of a beginning teacher's salary. Carefully screened teachers who exemplified excellence in their field and who were provided with training in cognitive coaching mentored the participants. The university supervisor, the mentor teacher, and the building administrator also participated in the mentoring process. Nine students in a traditional student teaching program formed a control group. Teacher performance was assessed using a survey to measure perceived attainment of state proficiencies for teachers; reflective journals, portfolios and videotapes produced by interns; and a final project evaluation completed by interns, principals, and mentor teachers. Quantitative evaluation found that the STEP participants received higher ratings than the control group, particularly in Proficiencies of Learner-Centered Knowledge and Equity in Excellence. In qualitative evaluation STEP participants were more concerned with student learning, needs, and welfare, while the control group were more concerned with their own performance. Overall, the findings confirmed that the STEP program was superior to the traditional teaching preparation program. The study instrument is appended. (Contains 14 references.) (JB)

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Reconceptualizing Student Teaching: A STEP Forward

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RECONCEPTUALIZING STUDENT TEACHING: A STEP FORWARD

INTRODUCTION

Educators and policy makers are aware of the challenges which face them in their efforts to develop a redesigned curriculum which will meet world class standards. A curriculum must be created which raises the standards of American schools to the point where the nation's students can successfully compete with other students from around the world. The National Council on Educational Standards and Testing addressed this issue in a document entitled *Raising Standards for American Education* (1992). The Council emphatically stated that it is impossible to create quality schools with high standards for students without having equally high standards for those who teach them. Reports such as this have led to a call for reform in the nation's teacher preparation programs. As Goodlad (1990) stated, "The conditions are ripe for far-reaching reform in the education of educators for our nation's schools" (p. 185). One such effort was initiated by West Texas A&M University and was entitled the Student/Teacher Expanded Program (STEP). Highly qualified undergraduate students who had completed all teacher education requirements except the professional semester were provided with a one-year credential to teach under close supervision.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of a redesigned teacher

education internship program, the STEP program, upon teaching interns' performance. Teacher performance was assessed using the following:

1. A survey designed to measure perceived attainment of the Texas State Board of Education Proficiencies for Teachers in The Texas Education Agency (TEA) (1994), *Learner-Centered Schools for Texas: A Vision for Texas Educators*, was completed by the interns, mentor teachers, building administrators and university supervisors.
2. Reflective journals, portfolios and video tapes were produced by the interns.
3. A final project evaluation (Appendix A) was completed by the interns, principals, and mentor teachers.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Criticism of the nation's schools is heard from a wide variety of sources. Frequently, much of the criticism is focused upon teachers and teacher education. While the specifics of the criticisms vary, Roth-Johnston (1992) found, upon a comprehensive review of the literature, that the criticisms are generally focused upon the beliefs that teacher education candidates often lack academic potential and that beginning teachers have not mastered the content which they teach. It was further reported that teacher education courses fail to prepare teachers for the realities of teaching and that more and improved field experiences should be provided to prospective teachers. The literature was also critical of teacher education programs for having failed to respond to changing

societal conditions such as technological development and new multi-ethnic demographics. (p. 2)

It is readily apparent that new ways of preparing teachers must be explored. Efforts to identify new preparation programs for teachers should include an examination of existing professional training models which appear to work successfully. Mentoring appears to be successful and is used in many professions. A mentor serves as a role model (Sheely, 1976), provides opportunities for growth (Wasden, 1988), and takes an active interest in career development of others (Daresh & Playko, 1989).

Teacher education must employ effective mentoring programs which have clearly defined objectives. Huling-Austin (1989) identified the primary objectives for mentoring programs as being:

1. to improve the teaching performance of new teachers;
2. to increase the retention of promising beginning teachers during the induction year;
3. to promote the personal and professional well-being of beginning teachers;
4. to satisfy mandated requirements related to induction; and,
5. to transmit the culture of the system to beginning teachers. (p. 16-24)

To achieve these objectives, mentor teachers have roles to perform which are critically important in supporting the success of beginning teachers. Daresh and Playko (1989) identified eight basic areas regarding the mentor's

responsibilities. These responsibilities include advising, communicating, counseling, guiding, modeling, protecting, developing skills, and giving time. As these roles are carried out, both the intern and the mentor benefit. The literature points out that mentors' professional development is enhanced by their working with beginning teachers, but additional incentives need to be provided for mentor teachers. Hutto and Haynes (1993) indicate that mentor teachers should be provided with release time adequate to provide supervision to interns, monetary rewards for their service, supervision training which is needed for their mentoring roles, and recognition for the professional service they have rendered.

Responsibility for mentoring beginning teachers is not limited to classroom teachers. Successful mentoring programs must also include input from building principals. Roseau (1990) and Sergiovanni (1991) indicate that the building principal's role as a mentor includes working cooperatively with interns to provide a clear vision of the mission of the school and how the beginning teacher may contribute to the mission. Specifically, the building administrator can communicate the school's expectations and provide assistance related to instructional planning, the use of innovative teaching strategies, and the creation of a safe, attractive learning environment.

In addition to classroom teachers and building principals, representatives from higher education play a significant role in inducting beginning teachers into the profession (Henry, 1988). According to Klug and Salzman (1990), the responsibilities of the higher education representatives include providing valid

assessments of the interns' performance through specific, descriptive, and objective feedback. The higher education representatives serve as a third role model and provide information regarding the acquisition of materials and media. Additionally, the higher education representatives serve as a sounding board on issues that the intern may not want to discuss with school personnel.

PROCEDURE

On May 13, 1994, West Texas A&M University received permission from the Texas State Board of Education to pilot the STEP project for five years beginning with the 1994-1995 academic year. Following board approval, applicants were recruited and selected.

To be accepted into the program, students were required to meet the following criteria:

1. 3.00 grade point average (GPA) in all courses attempted;
2. 3.25 GPA in all professional education courses or have passed the Professional Development Examination for the Certification of Educators in Texas (ExCET);
3. 3.00 GPA in all specialty/teaching field(s) courses or have passed the appropriate ExCET(s); and
4. Completed all degree requirements except the courses required during the professional semester.

Twenty-three applicants met the criteria. From this applicant pool, nine were employed as "teacher of record" by area school districts and, for purposes of

this study, were identified as the STEP Group (STG). These individuals were placed in one-year internships and paid 75% of a beginning teacher's salary. The STEP interns were mentored by carefully screened teachers who exemplify excellence in their field and who were provided with training in cognitive coaching. The mentors were paid 20% of the beginning teacher's salary, with the remaining 5% allocated to provide for professional development activities. The university supervisor, the mentor teacher, and the building administrator participated in the mentoring process and formed a STEP Committee for each intern. The committees met a minimum of twice in the fall and once in the spring to assess, to recommend improvement strategies, and to support the interns. Efforts were made to insure that at least one member of each committee held or was eligible for certification in the same area as the intern. Individual STEP Committee members observed interns in their classrooms and evaluated their performance. The interns also evaluated themselves. Mentors were required to document 80 hours of supervision and university supervisors were required to observe at least four times each semester. At the end of the year the STEP Committee was responsible for recommending certification or another year of internship with a one-year credential.

From the remaining pool of qualified applicants, nine students were randomly selected to become the Control Group (CG). They were placed in a traditional 12-week student teaching program. These student teachers were evaluated by their cooperating teachers, administrators and themselves.

A survey, *Proficiencies for Teachers*, (Appendix B) was used to measure the

performance of both the STG and the CG. This survey was developed by the Panhandle-South Plains Center for Professional Development and Technology Collaborative, a consortium of teacher education programs involving the four universities located in the Texas Panhandle and South Plains. The questionnaire consists of 51 items, each of which is an indicator of one of the five teacher proficiencies identified by the TEA. Each indicator is measured with a statement using a five point Likert-like scale rating. Participants received a score for each indicator ranging from "1" for poor performance to "5" for excellent performance.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH AND RESULTS

The study was a post-test only, static group comparison. This experimental design was chosen because random selection procedures could not be fully employed. Major threats to the validity of this design include maturation, mortality, selection and selection interaction. Efforts were made to equate the two groups by randomly selecting the CG from the qualified STEP applicants who were not selected for the STG.

To compare the participants in the STG with the participants in the CG, the following statistical analyses were performed. Using the General Linear Model (GLM), five nested analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were calculated. In each of the ANOVAs the dependent variable was the total score. The independent variables were the two groups and the evaluators nested within the groups. GLM was used due to the unequal N caused by missing data. On two of the

five ANOVAs, the overall effects were significant using an alpha of .05. The two proficiencies which were significant were Proficiency I, Learner-Centered Knowledge and Proficiency III, Equity. On the other three ANOVAs, the probabilities ranged from .06 for Proficiency V, Professional Development, .07 for Proficiency II, Learner-Centered Instruction and .15 for Proficiency IV, Learning-Centered Communication. The main effect for the groups were significant and in the expected direction for all five ANOVAs.

The STG received higher ratings on total scores than did the CG. No significant differences were found between the evaluators nested within the groups. This suggests reliability between raters. The means, standard deviations, F values, and significance levels are presented on the following page in Table 1.

Table 1

Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD), F Scores, & Significance Levels (p) Accrued For Each Proficiency By Raters

Proficiency I. Learner-Centered Knowledge

Rater	Group	M	SD	F	p
Self	CG	39.8	4.62	8.98	.004
Self	STG	40.7	1.72		
Teacher	CG	34.2	11.28		
Teacher	STG	39.8	4.88		
Univ. Sup	CG	34.2	5.46		
Univ. Sup	STG	41.3	2.29		
Principal	STG	40.3	3.66		

Proficiency II. Learner-Centered Instruction

Rater	Group	M	SD	F	p
Self	CG	55.3	5.95	10.38	.002
Self	STG	58.7	2.58		
Teacher	CG	50.3	16.62		
Teacher	STG	57.5	6.89		
Univ. Sup	CG	48.7	10.29		
Univ. Sup	STG	60.3	3.16		
Principal	STG	59.1	4.57		

Proficiency III. Equity

Rater	Group	M	SD	F	p
Self	CG	26.0	4.56	9.21	.003
Self	STG	26.1	2.31		
Teacher	CG	23.0	7.16		
Teacher	STG	25.8	4.10		
Univ. Sup	CG	22.1	3.76		
Univ. Sup	STG	28.3	1.73		
Principal	STG	28.1	1.83		

(CG) Control Group
(STG) Step Group

Proficiency IV. Learner-Centered Communications

Rater	Group	M	SD	F	p
Self	CG	38.6	4.50	5.66	.02
Self	STG	39.6	2.78		
Teacher	CG	33.8	10.86		
Teacher	STG	38.3	6.7		
Univ. Sup	CG	31.8	6.28		
Univ. Suv	STG	37.1	5.1		
Principal	STG	40.0	3.8		

Proficiency V. Learner-Centered Professional Development

Rater	Group	M	SD	F	p
Self	CG	63.6	6.94	8.58	.005
Self	STG	64.1	4.01		
Teacher	CG	53.2	19.70		
Teacher	STG	64.1	4.01		
Univ. Sup	CG	50.7	11.64		
Univ. Sup	STG	63.4	4.92		
Principal	STG	66.6	3.36		

(CG) Control Group
(STG) Step Group

The results suggest that the differences in ratings between the two groups, the STG and the CG do exist. The STG received higher ratings than did the CG in all five categories. These findings are most robust for the Proficiencies of Learner-Centered Knowledge and Equity in Excellence. No differences were found between raters within the two groups.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AND RESULTS

Reflective journals were kept during the internship by the STG and during student teaching by the CG. These journals were analyzed inductively. Information was unitized (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) with units serving as the

basis for defining categories. The units were then sorted into categories, and rules were devised to describe the categories. A second part of the journal analysis involved applying a coding scheme to describe problem solving undertaken by the interns. Finally, the journals of the interns were compared to those of the student teachers. Videotapes of the interns teaching and portfolios were used primarily for triangulation. Qualitative data were also obtained from written evaluations completed by interns, mentors, and principals at the end of the program.

A strong finding from the journal analysis was that many of the topics the interns selected to write about were student centered. For example, interns expressed concern about student learning, the needs of new students, and student welfare. In contrast to this, many of the topics selected by the student teachers were teacher-centered. They were concerned primarily with their own performance. Another finding regarding the content of the journals indicated that interns shared more successes than concerns and had more answers than questions. Also, interns expressed confidence in their abilities to solve problems and frequently evaluated the results of their problem solving. The STG did not depend on others to inform them of the success of their problem-solving strategies, but drew their own conclusions.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Several of the criticisms noted by Roth-Johnston (1992) have been addressed in

the STEP program and these program components help contribute to its success. The first two criticisms focused on the lack of academic potential of future teachers and inadequate mastery of the content they are to teach. To address this concern, STEP program participants were required to meet high grade point standards. Written evaluations from mentors indicate that interns arrived well prepared academically. This was supported by the statistically significant scores in Proficiency I, Learner-Centered Knowledge.

Roth-Johnston (1992) also suggested that future teachers are not prepared for the realities of teaching and need more and improved field experiences. A strong mentoring component and extended field experiences were integral parts of the STEP program. This induction process allowed interns to face the realities of teaching with the assistance of their mentors, administrators, and university representatives. Results of the quantitative and qualitative studies which compared STEP interns to a cohort group indicate that the mentored and extended field program was successful. STEP interns received higher ratings and appeared to be better prepared to face the realities of teaching than were comparable interns in the control group.

This study confirmed that STEP was superior to the traditional teaching preparation program for the population studied. However, it must be recognized that the search for finding improved teacher preparation programs must be continued and expanded. Therefore, similar studies should be replicated in other locales using differing populations and other alternative teacher preparation models.

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APPENDIX

Appendix A

STEP Evaluation

Please indicate the role of individuals at your table by checking below:

_____Principals _____Mentors _____Interns

Please record what your group considers to be:

Areas of Concern

Program Strengths

Ways to improve

STEP Evaluation (Continued)

Please indicate your role by checking below:

_____Principals _____Mentors _____Interns

Please give this evaluation careful thought and consideration. You feedback is valued and will be used to make changes to improve the program. For each category please address, from your perspective, the strengths, concerns, and suggestions for improvement.

Mentor:

Selection:

Training:

Roles/Responsibilities:

University preparation of interns:

Ongoing requirements for interns:

Journal:

Portfolio:

Video:

Principal's Role:

University supervisor's role:

Overall, how would you compare this program to traditional student teaching?

Appendix B

Proficiencies for Teachers
STEP INTERN Evaluation

DIRECTIONS: Using the following scale and a #2 pencil, mark the appropriate number on the scantron to indicate your perception of how well the intern has attained the State Adopted Proficiencies for Teachers. **Please enter the name of the student and, under identification number, bubble in the 2 under P.**

1 = Below Expectations
2 = Needs Improvement
3 = Satisfactory
4 = Exceeding Expectations
5 = Clearly Outstanding

I. Learner Centered Knowledge

The teacher possesses and draws on a rich knowledge of content pedagogy, and technology to provide relevant and meaningful learning experiences for all students.

1. Exhibits working knowledge of subject matter.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Stays abreast of current knowledge in content area, related disciplines, and technology.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Participates in professional development activities.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Collaborates with other professionals.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Understands the pedagogy of the discipline.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Organizes topics for practical application.	1	2	3	4	5
7. Integrates multiple disciplines into instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
8. Integrates learners interest into instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
9. Integrates technological resources into instruction.	1	2	3	4	5

II. Learner-Centered Instruction

To create a learner-centered community, the teacher collaboratively identifies needs; and plans, implements, and assesses instruction using technology and other resources.

10. Varies mode of instruction appropriately.	1	2	3	4	5
11. Makes instruction relevant to student experience.	1	2	3	4	5
12. Acquires, allocates and conserves resources.	1	2	3	4	5
13. Encourages self-directed learning.	1	2	3	4	5
14. Models respectful behavior.	1	2	3	4	5
15. Responds to needs of all learners.	1	2	3	4	5
16. Guides learners in meaningful self-assessment	1	2	3	4	5
17. Selects developmentally appropriate materials, technology, activities, space.	1	2	3	4	5
18. Adapts learning experiences to the learner community.	1	2	3	4	5
19. Uses assessments appropriate to the learner community.	1	2	3	4	5
20. Encourages critical and creative thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
21. Develops problem-solving skills.	1	2	3	4	5
22. Promotes life-long learning.	1	2	3	4	5

III. Equity in Excellence for All Learners

The teacher responds appropriately to diverse groups of learners.

23. Encourages and models respect for student diversity.	1	2	3	4	5
24. Designs learning experiences that respect student diversity.	1	2	3	4	5
25. Integrates cross-cultural experiences into instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
26. Establishes a relationship between the curriculum and community cultures.	1	2	3	4	5
27. Explores attitudes that foster unity.	1	2	3	4	5
28. Creates cooperative climate among diverse populations.	1	2	3	4	5

IV. Learner-Centered Communication

While acting as an advocate for all students and the school, the teacher demonstrates effective professional and interpersonal skills.

29. Creates environment for risk-taking and problem solving.	1	2	3	4	5
30. Establishes ties between school and community.	1	2	3	4	5
31. Develops verbal communication skills.	1	2	3	4	5
32. Uses media effectively.	1	2	3	4	5
33. Integrates multimedia into instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
34. Integrates artistic presentations into instruction.	1	2	3	4	5
35. Uses technology as a resource.	1	2	3	4	5
36. Recognizes multiple-level thinking.	1	2	3	4	5
37. Uses correct grammar in writing and speaking.	1	2	3	4	5

V. Learner-Centered Professional Development

The teacher, as a reflective practitioner dedicated to all students access demonstrates a commitment to learn, to improve the profession, and to maintaining professional ethics and personal integrity.

38. Respects clearly defined professional goals.	1	2	3	4	5
39. Develops a professional identity.	1	2	3	4	5
40. Develops relationships with colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
41. Contributes to setting standards for teacher accountability.	1	2	3	4	5
42. Respects need to continual professional growth.	1	2	3	4	5
43. Collaborates with peers.	1	2	3	4	5
44. Uses learner feedback for self-improvement.	1	2	3	4	5
45. Collaborates in decision-making.	1	2	3	4	5
46. Collaborates in problem-solving.	1	2	3	4	5
47. Exhibits professionalism.	1	2	3	4	5
48. Makes decisions based on ethical principles.	1	2	3	4	5
49. Demonstrates knowledge of Texas education system.	1	2	3	4	5
50. Knows and uses community and school resources.	1	2	3	4	5
51. Knows and respects laws/guidelines for teacher responsibilities and student rights.	1	2	3	4	5

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